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Changing Political News? Long-Term Trends in American, British, French, Italian, German and Swiss Press Reporting

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Abstract: This study intends to examine the relevance of Hallin and Mancini's characterizations of media systems for explaining news output produced by print media embedded in these systems. We employ a longitudinal design comparing print outlets from six Western systems (USA, GBR, GER, SUI, FRA, ITA) in 1960/61 and 2006/07. While we find clear convergence in the preference for opinionated stories in covering politics, the use of objectivity-related and negativity-related reporting features continues to differentiate journalism models. Although institutional aspects of media systems cannot be expected to be directly reflected in content, we are able to confirm several expectations by Hallin and Mancini, including their suspicion that France and Great Britain are borderline cases of their respective models. We conclude that similar technological and economic changes around the world as well as growing transnational exchanges between the national models have not led to an across the board, wholesale homogenization of news practices.

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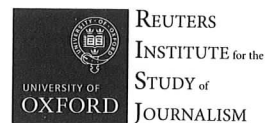
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Changing Political News? Long-Term Trends in American, British, French, Italian, German, and Swiss Print Media Reporting

Andrea Umbricht and Frank Esser

Introduction

Two opposing perspectives are prevalent in international comparative journalism research. The first assumes that political journalism in Western media systems has undergone a slow but definite standardisation since the 1960s – driven by the diffusion of Anglo-American professional standards, the influence of global news leaders such as the BBC, the *New York Times*, Reuters, and the Associated Press, and the imitation of reporting techniques proved to be professionally (journalism prizes) or commercially (audience responses) successful in the Anglo-American world. In addition, the emergence of global media markets and technological standards as well as European integration and the Americanisation of popular culture are seen as further forces driving the homogenisation of media. The opposite perspective does not deny these tendencies but argues that these processes will not eradicate deep-seated differences in national media structures and news cultures. These systemic differences have led Daniel C. Hallin and Paolo Mancini (2004) to develop three ‘models’ of Western media systems which, according to them, have shown their distinct contours most clearly in the 1960s and 1970s. Since then, they argue, Western media systems have become partially more similar without losing their different identities. The authors support their thesis of the continued relevance of the three models with evidence gathered mainly at the institutional level of media systems. What they do not examine, however, is the content produced by news media. In this chapter, we aim to fill this gap by

examining systematically whether the political news coverage produced by print media in six Western media systems has retained its characteristic differences over time or whether the content produced in different systems has become gradually more alike.

The comparative approach: three models of media and politics

The field of comparative political communication research has steadily grown during the last decades. Several scholars have theorised about and investigated empirically the influences of national media systems and political and cultural contexts (e.g. Blumler and Gurevitch, 2001; Pfetsch, 2001; Semetko et al., 1991), and identified different models of journalism after comparing historical roots and contemporary practices (e.g. Mancini, 2005; Williams, 2005). These works are consistent with a framework developed by Hallin and Mancini (2004) that uses four media-related and five politics-related dimensions to differentiate types of political communication systems. The media-related dimensions are the development of an audience-oriented and commercialised mass press; parallelism between party lines and newspaper lines; journalistic professionalism and independence; and the degree of state intervention in the regulation of media. The five politics-related dimensions concern the role of the state in society; majoritarian or consensus character of the political system; patterns of interest group organisation; distinction between moderate and polarised pluralism; and development of rational-legal authority in contrast to clientelist forms of social organisation.

On this basis, Hallin and Mancini establish three ideal typical models that form the theoretical backbone of our analysis: the liberal model, the democratic corporatist model, and the polarised pluralist model. They categorise as *liberal* those countries where press freedom and mass-circulation press developed early, where state interference in the media sector is low, and where parallelism between political parties and editorial preferences of newspapers is also low. On the other hand, internal pluralism in newspapers is high, as is the professional status and political independence of journalists. The established textbook history argues that news organisations in this model gained independence from party-political bonds in the middle of the nineteenth century when commercial pressures began to push partisanship out of newspapers (Chalaby, 1996:

320). The US press is often presented as a case in point. Here, newspapers became prosperous in the 1880s because they increased their readership by reducing one-sided propaganda (Fengler and Russ-Mohl, 2008: 679). The fact that newspapers supplanted commentaries by news reports facilitated the spread of the objectivity norm and boosted revenues from sales and advertising (Chalaby, 1996: 303). Canada and Ireland are other countries grouped as liberal, as is, with some restrictions, Great Britain.

The *polarised pluralist* model features an elite-oriented press with limited overall circulation. Journalism here originates as an extension of the worlds of literature and politics and has historically been an elite occupation. The literary and political roots can be seen in the strong presence of commentaries, intellectual analysis, political judgement, and ideological tendencies (Benson and Hallin, 2007: 35). Newspapers are largely focused on politics and distinguished by relatively strong external pluralism and advocacy journalism. Political parallelism dominated for most of the twentieth century, and the tradition of partisan newspapers overlapped with the practice of instrumentalisation. Many newspapers did not become financially independent and stayed reliant on the goodwill and support of political parties, the state, and/or influence-seeking owners (Hallin and Mancini, 2004: 114; Hallin and Papathanassopoulos, 2002: 18). Press freedom developed late, professionalisation was weak, and the autonomy of journalists was limited. At the national level of polarised pluralist systems, formal accountability systems like press councils are absent, professional organisations and journalists' unions are generally weak, and there is little consensus on ethical standards in the media (Rieffel, 1984). Spain, Portugal, and Italy are classified in this model, as is, with some restrictions, France.

The *democratic corporatist* model includes countries with an early development of press freedom, high newspaper circulation, and strong journalistic professionalisation. The historically strong political parallelism in the media bears traces of external pluralism and slightly partisan and advocate opinion journalism. Partisan journalism is rooted in the close ties to politics through corporatist bargaining and interest negotiations. It coexists with a high level of professionalism which is evident in the widespread recognition of ethical norms regardless of journalists' political affiliations (Williams, 2005: 66). Systems belonging to this model include Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark, and the other Nordic countries, as well as Germany and Switzerland.

Naturally these models represent theoretical ideal types, and some real-world cases cannot be categorised easily. For instance, the liberal model suggests a professional emphasis on neutrality but much British newspaper journalism shows remarkable degrees of political parallelism and is more adequately assigned a mid-position between US professionalism and continental European partisan tendencies (Schudson, 2001: 167). The notion 'Anglo-American' refers to the numerous commonalities between the British and US media and political systems (liberal democracies with little state intervention in the press, majoritarian political systems, two large catch-all parties, many catch-all newspapers, etc.), but obscures some very important differences (the greater role of public broadcasting, press partisanship, tabloid news culture, and competition in Britain). It is thus necessary to ask whether such an Anglo-American model really exists (Mancini, 2005: 78). France is another mixed case, falling between the polarised pluralist and democratic corporatist models. It is characterised by a strong role of the state, polarised pluralism, and a history of strong political parallelism, but also by a relatively strong mass-oriented regional press and a more developed tradition of rational-legal authority that favour a more fact-oriented news style.

Our study examines how relevant Hallin and Mancini's typology of media systems is in terms of explaining news coverage produced by print media embedded in each of these systems, a relationship that many scholars have noted we know little about (e.g. Jones, 2007: 130). We derive hypotheses from the aforementioned models and relate them directly to measurable characteristics of news content. We then compare the results of a content analysis with the expectations derived from the theoretical models. We are thus in a position to examine whether the historical and structural differences behind the models are reflected in political news coverage and whether there is a blurring of reporting styles over time due to globalisation, commercialisation, diffusion, and European integration.

Theoretical dimensions and hypotheses

The first content-related indicator that can be expected to differentiate journalistic output across Western press systems is *opinion-orientation* in the news (Benson and Hallin, 2007; Strömbäck and Dimitrova, 2006; Wessler et al., 2010). Journalism in continental European systems has often been found to be more opinionated than in liberal media systems

(Hallin and Mancini, 2004: 61–3). Surveys have also repeatedly shown that journalists from continental European systems subscribe to more active reporting roles and are more comfortable with advocating a political position than their Anglo-American colleagues who see themselves as detached observers (Donsbach and Patterson, 2004; Hanitzsch, 2011). The proximity of the journalistic profession to the literary field and the later differentiation from the political sphere have contributed to a greater emphasis on commentary and advocacy in European journalism – particularly in the Mediterranean countries – than in the Anglo-American tradition. We thus expect elements of opinion-orientation to be highest in newspapers from polarised pluralist systems. The second-highest level of opinion-orientation may be expected in newspapers from the democratic corporatist model where, due to a residual element of historical political parallelism and systems characterised by external pluralism, opinionated news will be more widespread than in the Anglo-American system (Wessler et al., 2010: 237). Finally, in line with the standardisation hypothesis discussed above, we expect the level of opinion-orientation in the news to converge over time, reflecting a growing professional consensus about the norms of news reporting, in particular with regard to the inclusion of journalistic voice.

H 1.1: The degree of opinion-orientation in the news is highest in polarised pluralist news systems and lowest in the US news system.

H 1.2: Due to globalisation and the spread of critical professionalism, the level of opinion-orientation in the news has converged in Western media systems over time.

The second concept that is assumed to distinguish the reporting pattern in the three models is *objectivity*. Vos (2012: 436) argues that objective journalism refers to 'an emphasis on verifiable facts, a factual arrangement of the news, reporting that accurately reflects events, impartial and balanced reporting and writing, a detached and impersonal point of view, and the separation of news and editorial functions of the news organization'. Objectivity is strongly rooted in the US context and distinguishes American journalism from a more interpretive European tradition (Donsbach, 1995). According to the US objectivity principle, journalists should report the news without commenting on it and present each side of a debate (Schudson, 2001: 150). Mancini (2000: 273)

argues that it is far easier for Anglo-American journalists to exercise objectivity and political neutrality because of the limitation of political choice arising from the two-party system. The prompt transmission of facts, expert sources, and eyewitness accounts became the cornerstone of the Anglo-American model (Williams, 2005: 63), and this new press used a straightforward language, separating newspapers from more elite political outlets (Mancini, 2005: 79). Journalists claim objectivity by citing procedures they follow which exemplify the formal attributes of a news story. Such strategies enhance the credibility of news stories and help journalists defend themselves against outside criticism. These formal attributes are presentation of conflicting possibilities; presentation of supporting facts that speak for themselves; use of quotation marks; story structure that follows an inverted pyramid; and the formal separation of facts and opinion (Tuchman, 1972: 665–70). We expect these professional routines to be used the least in newspapers from polarised pluralist systems because journalistic professionalism is weaker, training standards lower, and rational-legal authority less developed in these countries – all characteristics that should result in less respect for norms and standardised procedures of behaviours (Mancini, 2007b: 15). We expect political news coverage in democratic corporatist systems to be slightly less objective than in Anglo-American systems due to the historically strong political parallelism that has left some commentary-oriented journalism in Northern Europe. US newspapers will use these techniques most frequently because they fit the higher levels of market orientation and journalistic professionalisation. Second, we assume a rise in objective reporting from the 1960s to today because of the growing commercialised character of Western media systems, rising educational standards, and the diffusion of particular professional norms (Hallin and Mancini, 2004: 272–3; Mancini, 2000: 268).

H 2.1: The use of professional routines demonstrating adherence to the ideal of objectivity is highest in US news stories and lowest in polarised Mediterranean news stories. Britain and France are borderline cases of their respective models.

H 2.2: Due to rising commercialisation, journalistic professionalisation, and the expanding recognition of objectivity as a key attribute of independent news, the level of objectivity has generally risen throughout Western media systems over time.

The third theoretical criterion is *negativity*, meaning a preference for bad instead of good news. It often comes in the form of reports on problems, failings, confrontations, attacks, scandals, or political incompetence. Research has identified certain ‘drivers’ that help predict levels of negativity in the news. First, journalists may simply reflect a political culture in which political institutions enjoy low levels of public confidence, polarised conflicts over fundamental ideological questions are frequent, or politicians attack each other regularly and stage controversy publicly in anticipation of its inherent news value. Second, a widely shared role perception of journalists being watchdogs of those holding political or economic power leads to a press coverage that keeps record of complaints, unresolved problems, and misbehaviours. Third, because negative political news can be presented in dramatic, eye-catching, and easy-to-understand ways it has an inherent appeal that may be exploited in commercially oriented media environments. Fourth, over time journalism may have undergone a generational shift towards critical scrutiny of politicians’ motivations, exposing their strategies and blunders, and confronting each statement with a counterstatement by a known opponent. The desire to deconstruct politics is likely to be further enhanced by the presence of spin doctors and news management. The first driver is strong in the polarised pluralist systems whereas the other drivers are often associated with liberal systems. We therefore expect newspapers from the liberal systems to show the highest levels of negativity in the news, and the steepest increase over time. The newspapers from the polarised pluralist systems are expected to take a middle position and those from the consensus democracies of the corporatist model to rank lowest.

H 3.1: The level of negativity in the news is lower in the consensus-oriented democratic corporatist systems than in the Anglo-American or the Southern European systems.

H 3.2: Due to the spread of commercial pressures and critical professionalism the level of negativity in the news has increased across Western systems, with liberal systems showing the largest increase.

The three journalistic models should also diverge in terms of the access they grant to different *sources* in public discourse. Ferree and colleagues (2002: 86) use the term ‘standing’ to denote the voice given to actors in

the news. Standing is not the same as just being mentioned; it refers to actors being quoted or paraphrased in a story. Citing sources from direct observers is considered as a way of verification of the news, and as a method of providing competing arguments (Dimitrova and Strömbäck, 2009). Drawing on Wessler (2008), we expect the following threefold pattern. First, due to greater state intervention and closer relationships between the media and the political field, we assume political elite actors from parties and the state to be more prominent in Southern European media systems than in the Anglo-American ones (Benson and Hallin, 2007: 30; Ferree et al., 2002: 89). Second, we assume that organised social groups of civil society (i.e. trade union representatives, social movements, interest groups, employers' associations, religious organisations) play the largest role in newspapers of democratic corporatist systems and the smallest in Anglo-American countries (Hallin and Mancini, 2004: 74; Wessler, 2008: 231). Third, individual sources like ordinary citizens or experts are expected to be most prominent in the US press because of a greater emphasis on individual freedoms and interests (Ferree et al., 2002: 98; Wessler, 2008: 231).

H 4.1: (a) The standing of 'political elite sources' in the news is highest in polarised Mediterranean news systems and lowest in the Anglo-American ones. (b) The standing of 'organised social group sources' is highest in the corporatist systems and lowest in the Anglo-American ones. (c) The standing of 'individual sources' is highest in Anglo-American ones.

H 4.2: (a) The standing of 'political elite sources' in the news has shrunk in all news systems (due to a differentiation from the political field and due to new technologies for gathering information that reduce the journalists' dependence on official sources). (b) The standing of 'individual sources' has increased (due to an emphasis on vivid storytelling in the use of citizen sources, and a growing 'scientification' of the discourse in the use of expert sources).

Method

To systematically examine developments in print media coverage of politics in different media systems, we conducted a quantitative content analysis of 18 news outlets over a time span of five decades. The relevant

details can be seen in Table 10.1. The USA, Britain, Germany, Switzerland, France, and Italy are selected to ensure that two countries from each of the three media system models developed by Hallin and Mancini are covered. The study examines randomly chosen routine phases of political affairs coverage from the years 1960–1 and 2006–7 to allow for long-time comparison. The early 1960s are commonly defined as the golden period of political press coverage characterised by large audiences and growing budgets whereas the late 2000s are marked by increasing global, digital, and commercial competition (see Tunstall, 1996, 2008).

From each of the six countries, we considered news outlets from three different print media sectors: national newspapers, regional newspapers, and weeklies. In each country we aimed for a national quality newspaper that serves as agenda setter, a regional paper to account for the regional structure of the press market, and a widely read and influential weekly.

Table 10.1 Sample of news outlets for cross-country analysis (1960s/2000s)

Models	Countries	News outlets	No. of articles	
			1960s	2000s
Liberal Anglo-American	United States (USA)	<i>New York Times</i>	130	88
		<i>St. Louis Post-Dispatch</i>	101	86
		<i>Time Magazine</i>	50	41
	Great Britain (GBR)	<i>The Times</i>	124	65
		<i>Birmingham Mail</i>	79	44
		<i>Observer</i>	114	67
Corporatist Germanic	Germany (GER)	<i>Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung</i>	120	193
		<i>Rheinische Post</i>	142	147
		<i>Spiegel</i>	30	50
	Switzerland (SWI)	<i>Neue Zürcher Zeitung</i>	59	96
		<i>Berner Zeitung</i>	49	112
		<i>Weltwoche</i>	48	51
Polarised Mediterranean	France (FRA)	<i>Le Monde</i>	76	128
		<i>Ouest France</i>	89	74
		<i>L'Express</i>	31	87
	Italy (ITA)	<i>Corriere della Sera</i>	60	231
		<i>Resto del Carlino</i>	57	154
		<i>Espresso</i>	46	93

Sample N=3,212 articles.

The peculiar British press market does not fit these selection criteria well. We opted for a regional tabloid that was exceptionally strong in the first half of our study period but which has subsequently come under massive pressure (like the great majority of British regionals); and we opted for a Sunday paper because the unusually strong British Sunday market has prevented news magazines (in the tradition of *Time*, *Spiegel*, and *L'Express*) from gaining a foothold.

We analysed two 24-month periods (1960–1 and 2006–7). From every second month of these periods we selected a randomly chosen issue from each newspaper and analysed all articles that contained political actors and were either printed or mentioned on the front page – irrespective of whether they offered news, commentary, or interviews. The focus on the front page ensures that all the articles considered most important by editors and most likely to be noticed by readers are included in the analysis (Strömbäck and Dimitrova, 2006).¹ For weeklies printed in magazine format the sampling procedure was adjusted to include: (a) the cover story plus those articles linked to the cover story in the table of contents, (b) all other stories mentioned on the cover, and (c) all articles prominently highlighted in the table of contents. This procedure yielded a total of N=3,212 political articles. They constitute the universe of this study (see Table 10.1).

Our data analysis is guided by our hypotheses, and the relevant concepts were operationalised as follows.

Opinion-orientation

Drawing on Benson and Hallin's (2007) study we coded each article with respect to its main journalistic function and included the following revised categories: 'straight news' (descriptive, concise); 'long news with background' (providing context); 'interpretation and analysis' (explanation, speculation); 'opinionated stories' (formal commentaries or information pieces mixed with opinion); or 'interviews'. Here we are only interested in the category of 'opinionated stories' which includes editorials, personal columns, commentary, and other types of story that heavily mix information with subjective assessments and evaluations.

Objectivity

Drawing on Tuchman (1972) we measured objectivity as a professional strategy that guides reporters on how to write a story that will be

recognised as objective. We adopted her criteria, revised them slightly, and coded them as dichotomous variables at the story level: the presentation of opposing 'pro and con' viewpoints; the use of 'expert sources'; the use of 'direct quotations and indirect speech'; and a 'hard-facts-first structure'. Based on how often these four indicators were coded in stories from the six countries, we created an aggregate objectivity index for each story that sums up the four dichotomous sub-variables and ranges (based on a standardised formula) from 0 to 1.² For simplicity we will only report the aggregate indices in our analysis.

Negativity

We operationalised negativity by four sub-variables. First, we coded 'negative tone' if the tonality in a news report is pessimistic (for instance by referring to threats, risks, undesirable trends, antagonism, gloom). Second, we coded whether a 'conflict frame' was imposed on a story (for instance by zooming in on disputes and disagreements between political actors). Third, we coded 'political incompetence' if a story centres on political weaknesses and failings or displays scepticism toward the capabilities of a political actor. Fourth, we coded 'political scandals' if a story reports intense public communication about a real or imagined defect or misbehaviour in politics that provokes widespread indignation or outrage. As before, we constructed a standardised aggregate index from these four indicators that ranges (based on the same mathematical formula) from 0 to 1.

Use of sources

Sources are actors in a news story who are quoted with direct or indirect speech. Our coding categories are based on a typology developed by Benson and Hallin (2007) to which we added some minor modifications. To rate the prominence of 'political elites' in the news we measured quotations and paraphrases of the executive, legislative, and judiciary. To determine the salience of 'organised social groups' from civil society we coded the presence of trade union representatives, social movements or interest groups, employers' associations, and religious organisations. Finally, we measured the use of 'individual sources' in the form of quotes or paraphrases from ordinary citizens or experts.³

Results

News organisations are embedded – or institutionalised – in national environments that shape the practices within those organisations. Institutionalisation occurs through processes that are influenced by the political economy of the national media markets, national policy styles and regulatory approaches, and national reception prisms that audiences use to process political news as relevant. These and other forces have a socialisation effect on journalists that leads them to report the news in ways that are at least partially country specific. This means that the nation is a still meaningful framework for comparative analysis (see Donsbach and Patterson, 2004; Hallin and Mancini, 2004; Hanitzsch, 2011; Weaver, 1998) and a nationally comparative approach is adopted here as well.

Opinion-orientation

Hypothesis 1.1 presumes the degree of opinion-orientation (either in the form of clearly labelled commentaries or stories mixing information and opinion) to be lowest in news outlets embedded in the US press system and highest in outlets from polarised Mediterranean systems. As can be seen from Figure 10.1, the news coverage of the 1960s clearly supports Hypothesis 1.1. However, by the late 2000s the distinctions between the journalistic styles have become blurred and the use of opinion-oriented story types in the different press systems has become more similar.⁴ Still, and as expected by our discussion of the journalism models, the frequency of opinionated news remains lowest in the US press throughout the entire period under investigation. In the 1960s, French and Italian newspapers do share a great fondness for opinionated journalism which clearly seems to reflect the partisan tradition of polarised pluralist systems. It also supports the results of an earlier comparative content analysis by Benson and Hallin (2007: 37) which found a higher inclination for opinion in French than US papers. This can be explained by commentary being traditionally the most celebrated form of writing in French news journalism (Chalaby, 1996: 315).

Hypothesis 1.2 expects the degree of opinion-orientation to converge in Western press systems. This is also clearly supported by our results. The US and particularly the British press have significantly increased their use of opinion-oriented stories and become more European in this regard. The French press, on the other hand, has significantly scaled

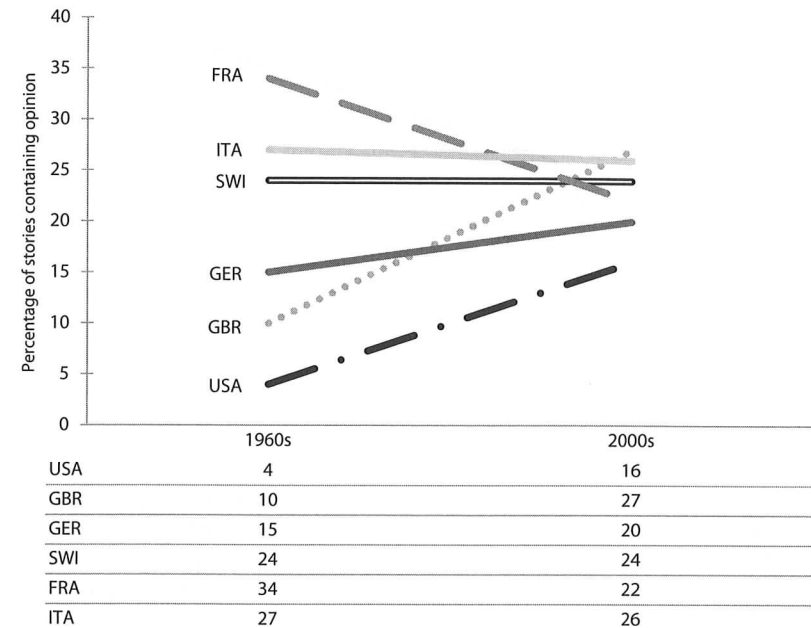


Figure shows proportion of stories coded as either 'commentary' or 'stories mixing information with opinion'. Not depicted are the other story types: 'straight news', 'long background news', 'analysis and interpretation', and 'interview'. Based on N=3,212 stories.

Figure 10.1 Use of opinion in political coverage (1960s/2000s)

back its preference for opinion, presumably under the influence of global diffusion of professional values and transnational coorientation in the news media business. These findings also offer tentative support for our suspicion that Great Britain and France are borderline cases of their respective models.

Objectivity

Hypothesis 2.1 predicts that features associated with the strategic rituals of objectivity will be most visible in US news reports and least visible in Mediterranean stories, and it expects to find support for classifying Great Britain and France as mixed cases. These assumptions are supported by the results reported in Figure 10.2. Objectivity-related news practices are most

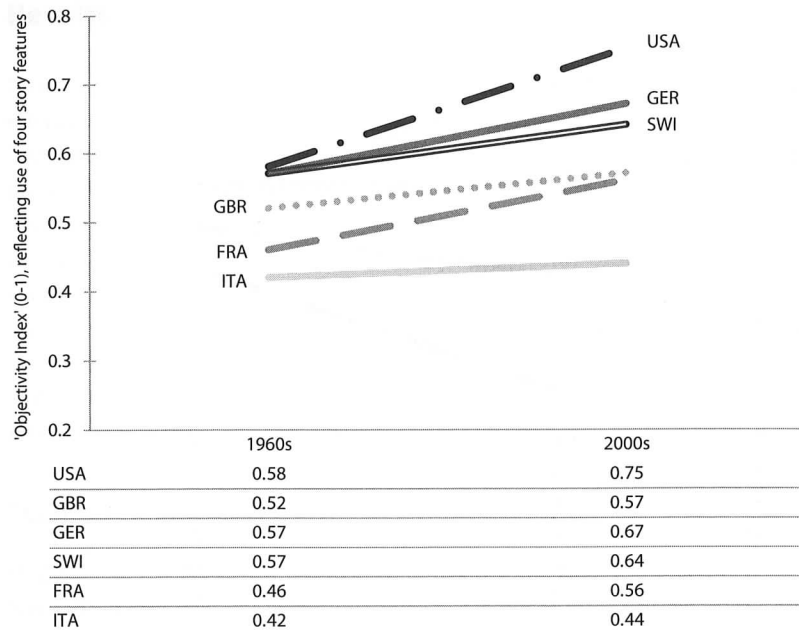


Figure shows average frequency of four elements in political stories: inclusion of opposing 'pro and con' viewpoints, use of 'expert sources', use of 'direct quotations and indirect speech', a 'hard-facts-first structure' (aggregated to index; see method section). Based on N=3,009 stories.

Figure 10.2 Use of objectivity-related elements in political coverage (1960s/2000s)

prevalent in US papers and least so in French and Italian papers, although some interesting qualifications apply. First of all, British and French newspapers confirm their status as borderline cases that make them hard to classify. This is particularly true for the British press which has removed itself from the US understanding of objectivity considerably and makes the notion of an Anglo-American model of journalism (as championed by Chalaby, 1996) increasingly hard to sustain. The German papers show, on the other hand, that they have internalised the lessons provided by American instructors after World War II and diligently integrated them in their in-house training programmes. At least that is what the data suggest. The Swiss-German papers studied show great affinity with the press in neighbouring Germany.

Proceeding to Hypothesis 2.2 we find also clear support for our expectation that from the 1960s to the 2000s the ideal of objectivity has been increasingly disseminated and recognised in the Western press. The use of objectivity-related news practices has not declined in any of the six systems but it is remarkable that throughout the entire period the Italian press stays far behind in last place. The fact that objectivity-related reporting strategies have risen cross-nationally does not mean, however, that the press systems have become more similar in this respect. On the contrary: the gap between 'objective' and 'non-objective' news cultures has continued to grow.⁵ In sum we can conclude that both our objectivity-related hypotheses have been confirmed.

Negativity

Our findings in Figure 10.3 illustrate that in the 1960s the levels of negativity in political news coverage varied significantly between the six press systems and that the levels of negativity have become even more dissimilar over time.⁶ In the 1960s, the news stories in the consensus democracies of the democratic corporatist systems were the least negative, confirming our prediction in Hypothesis 3.1. However, counter to our expectations, we find that newspapers from the polarised pluralist systems report politics more negatively than newspapers from the liberal systems. We assumed the effects of commercialisation and critical professionalism in the Anglo-American systems would induce roughly similar levels of negativity to those produced by the effects of polarisation and inter-party contestation in the polarised systems. But it appears as if the effects of the political systems are stronger than those of the media system. We have no reason to believe that this somewhat surprising result is influenced by our methodology.⁷ In fact, it is broadly in line with findings reported by Benson and Hallin (2007) and Benson (2010) who also describe French news reports as containing more critical coverage than US newspaper reports. This common finding seems to underscore that the high degree of ideological diversity in a multi-party system, the existence of anti-system political parties, and a tendency to question the legitimacy of political institutions foster high values of negativity in the polarised model.

Hypothesis 3.2 expects a growth in media negativity in all six press systems due to increased market-orientation, journalistic autonomy, and critical professionalism. However, this assumption is only partly supported. Negativity has risen significantly in the commercialised US

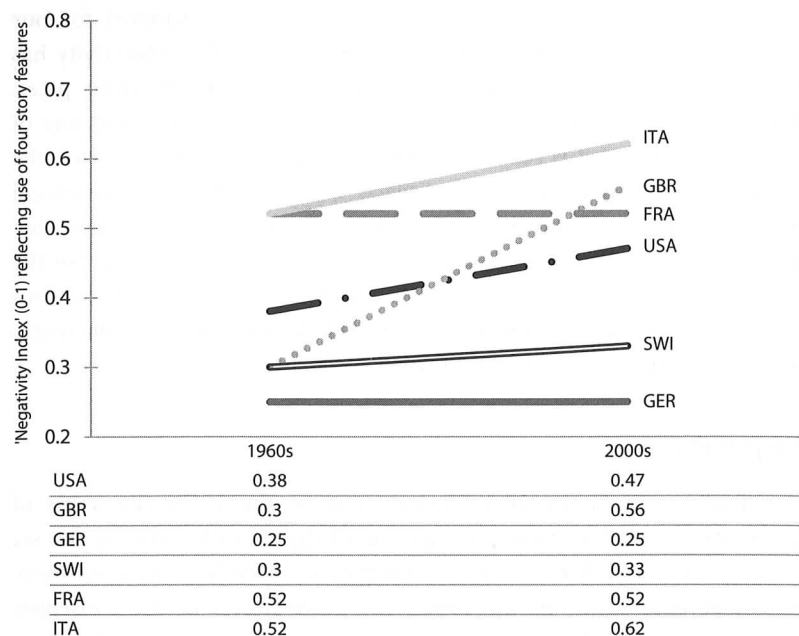


Figure shows average frequency of four elements in political stories: 'negative story tenor', 'conflict-oriented frame', 'incompetence frame', and 'scandalisation frame' (aggregated to index; see method section). Stories clearly relating to other countries than their own were excluded from this analysis. Based on N=1,626 stories.

Figure 10.3 Use of negativity in political coverage (1960s/2000s)

and British press systems, particularly due to intensified coverage of 'political incompetence' and 'political scandals'. Despite a considerable boost in British and US papers, negativity is less intensive than in Italian newspapers which paint politics in fairly dark, pessimistic colours. This contrasts most conspicuously with the situation in Germany and Switzerland where the newspapers express a remarkably steady sobriety in their political coverage. In sum, the extremely diverse developments run contrary to the assumption of homogenising tendencies in terms of negativity.

News sources

US newspapers integrate a higher number of sources per article, measured as actors being either quoted or paraphrased in a news story, than newspapers of the other press systems (see Table 10.2). This result is consistent with Donsbach's (1995) finding that US journalists make much greater use of eyewitnesses, experts, spokespersons, and ordinary citizens as news sources than journalists in other Western systems.⁸ The reliance on news sources increases strongly in most systems (with the exception of Italy) but so far the appreciation of source- and research-intensive reporting is still weaker at European than American papers.

Moving to a more in-depth analysis presented in Table 10.3 we observe a significant association between the six press systems and the variety of sources presented in the news.⁹ Our prediction in Hypothesis 4.1(a) that 'political elite' sources are utilised more frequently in media systems shaped by greater state intervention and closer proximity of the political field is only weakly supported, because the French newspapers counter expectations by using them the least in the 2000s. In contrast, Italian newspapers show the highest preference for political elite sources, supporting our expectations.

Table 10.2 Frequency of news sources in political coverage (1960s/2000s)

		USA	GBR	GER	SWI	FRA	ITA
Average number of sources per article	1960s	4.0 ^a	2.8 ^b	2.4 ^b	2.6 ^{ab}	3.2 ^{ab}	3.5 ^{ab}
	2000s	7.0 ^a	4.3 ^b	4.0 ^{bc}	3.4 ^c	4.4 ^b	3.4 ^c
Change		+ 3.0***	+ 1.5***	+ 1.6***	+ 0.8	+ 1.2**	- 0.1
Total N=1907 articles	1960s	193	122	169	13	94	74
	2000s	149	131	270	150	195	347

Table shows average frequency of directly or indirectly quoted sources. Based on N=1,907 stories; stories clearly relating to other countries than their own were excluded from this analysis. Means with different superscript letters are significantly different; means with the same superscript are not statistically different (1960s: post-hoc Dunnett's T3 test; 2000s: post-hoc LSD test) at $p < .05$ level. Differences between the 1960s and 2000s: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Hypothesis 4.1(b) expects that 'organised social groups' from civil society play the biggest role in the corporatist systems and the smallest role in the liberal systems. However, the use of organised social group sources does not differ substantially across systems. The data provide only limited support for the corporatism hypothesis as Swiss newspapers show indeed the highest amount of 'organised social groups' during the 1960s, whereas the German press does not integrate many organised sources. Meanwhile, the organised sources have come to be most common in Italian political news reports, thus disconfirming Hypothesis 4.1(b). Another study by Wessler (2008) also failed to establish a greater standing of organised groups in democratic corporatist news systems. We conclude that their greater de facto significance in corporatist systems does not translate to greater media prominence – on the contrary, organised groups may prefer to conduct their lobby work outside the media spotlight.

In an effort to address Hypotheses 4.1(a) and 4.2(b) from another angle, we determined each story's topic profile under three basic categories: 'policy issues' (e.g. economy, security, education, social problems); 'political elites' (e.g. government, parties); and 'organised social groups' (e.g. trade unions, employers' associations, social movement groups, religious organisations). Space constraints prevent us from presenting detailed results, but the breakdown provides weak support for our hypothesis on political elite and no support for our hypothesis concerning attention to organised social groups in democratic corporatist systems. The relationship between these source groups and news coverage is obviously much less linear and direct than the theoretical model would lead us to believe.

Hypothesis 4.1(c) predicts that the standing of 'individuals' is greater in Anglo-American news outlets than in those from continental Europe. Again, the findings in Table 10.3 provide only limited support for this. Individual sources are represented prominently in the US, but relatively infrequently in the British press. Contrary to our expectations, the French papers focus quite intensively on individual sources and differ clearly from Italian news practices. Nonetheless, there is one common conclusion that can be drawn from the sourcing patterns in the Mediterranean systems: polarised, fragmented multi-party systems increase the likelihood of a broad range of voices entering the news arena. In times of controversy the French journalists may invite reactions from notables, public intellectuals, and spokespeople ('individuals'), while in Italy organised groups from outside the established party system seize every news opportunity (including unions, protest groups, and the Church).

Table 10.3 Types of sources in political coverage
(1960s/2000s)

(%)		USA	GBR	GER	SWI	FRA	ITA
Political elite ^a	1960s	62	57	59	61	58	74
	2000s	51	53	65	57	42	66
Individuals ^b	1960s	09	06	03	11	07	02
	2000s	18	09	11	13	22	04
Organised social groups ^c	1960s	07	11	07	14	07	07
	2000s	10	06	07	10	11	18
Media ^d	1960s	03	04	14	11	05	13
	2000s	03	02	03	05	04	04
Business	1960s	03	08	04	03	04	04
	2000s	04	04	06	05	09	04
Unnamed sources ^e	1960s	05	10	05	00	11	02
	2000s	02	19	03	03	05	02
Other sources	1960s	11	06	07	00	08	02
	2000s	12	08	05	08	07	03
Total %	1960s	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
	2000s	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Total N=7,352 of sources	1960s	(781)	(339)	(409)	(36)	(298)	(257)
	2000s	(1,044)	(565)	(1,080)	(512)	(864)	(1,167)

Based on N=1,907 stories; items clearly relating to other countries than their own were excluded from this analysis. Totals can be different from 100% due to rounding. Most stories were coded for multiple number of sources (e.g. if two trade unions were quoted both were counted as organised social groups). Percentages are based on all sources mentioned in one national system.

- President and prime minister, cabinet members, other government officials, legislators, political party officials, judiciary.
- Ordinary citizens, experts.
- Trade unions, employers' associations, religious organisations, social movement groups.
- Journalists and other media, news agencies.
- Undisclosed and unidentifiable sources.

Hypothesis 4.2(a) is supported as the standing of political elite sources in the news has receded in all systems except Germany. Hypothesis 4.2(b) is also supported as the standing of individual sources in the news has increased in all systems. This can be attributed to a more popularised reporting style that values personal narratives, or to a

growing scientification of the political discourse that integrates specialist knowledge from experts.

Conclusion

This study is informed by two theoretical perspectives on long-term development in political journalism: one focuses on those forces pushing for the convergence of systems and homogenisation of news practices and content; the other focuses on deep-seated differences in structures and cultures that serve as brakes on this path and ensure that original contours of models are preserved over time. Focusing on the situation in Western press systems, we started by outlining the three most elaborate models found in the comparative literature so far, namely those developed by Hallin and Mancini, and derived a set of hypotheses on how differences in press *systems* (and change over time) may play out in news *content*. Here our study makes a clear contribution to a better understanding of these models as the content-specific, discursive elements have so far received little attention in comparative media systems research. The theoretically grounded indicators used to examine system-related differences in reporting styles are opinion-orientation, objectivity, negativity, and sourcing patterns. To further examine whether we find more support for a convergence or maintenance of models we employed a longitudinal design comparing print outlets from six Western systems (USA, Great Britain, Germany, Switzerland, France, and Italy) in 1960–1 and 2006–7. While we find clear convergence in the preference for opinionated stories in covering politics, the use of objectivity-related and negativity-related reporting features continues to differentiate journalism models more or less according to our theoretical expectations.

With regard to opinion-orientation, the emerging shared tendency of Western newspapers to devote about one quarter of their top political stories to opinionated journalism may be explained by a gradual blending of European influences (with a high appreciation for commentary) and American influences (with a growing appreciation for interpretation). Objectivity is a reporting convention that originates in the US but is increasingly gaining traction in democratic corporatist systems. At the same time, it is gradually separating US and British newspaper journalism, making the myth of a coherent Anglo-American ideal less and less sustainable. In fact, British newspapers seem to be aligning more and

more with French and Italian papers in their use of opinion, objectivity, and negativity. The US, on the other hand, stands out as a press system that values opinion the least and the use of sources and other objectivity-related story elements the most. For all Western systems it is noteworthy that the growing use of objectivity and opinion developed in parallel without mutually excluding each other. This points to a potentially more complex and hybrid style of political coverage, a style that is not necessarily detrimental to democracy.

Negativity is highest in those systems that are marked by high levels of political polarisation (Italy, France) and/or high levels of media commercialisation (USA, Great Britain). Further analyses will be needed to draw new groupings of press systems based on their reporting patterns. One area calling for further research is the use of sources, where the patterns found here are only partly reconcilable with our theoretical expectations. Contrary to what Hallin and Mancini's term 'corporatist media system' leads one to expect, our analysis provides no evidence that corporatist groups play significantly larger roles in German and Swiss public discourse than in other media systems. Also, the idea that presumably more individualistic 'liberal' systems grant more media attention to individuals turns out to be unfounded.

We conclude that political reporting practices cannot be integrated without contradiction into existing media system typologies. System differences do not map directly onto differences in how journalists cover politics. However, we are able to confirm several expectations derived from the work by Hallin and Mancini, including their suspicion that France and Great Britain are borderline cases. While both the liberal and the polarised pluralist systems lose internal consistency over time, our analysis reveals a remarkable similarity and stability of the reporting patterns at German and Swiss newspapers. We can also conclude that similar technological and economic changes around the world as well as growing transnational exchanges between the national models have not led to an across-the-board, wholesale homogenisation of news practices. This only further underlines the relevance of comparative research. The arguably most important implication our conclusions have for comparative research is that the institutional aspects of media systems should not be expected to be directly reflected in content. While systemic contexts influence news production, journalism remains an autonomous force that is as much shaped by internal values of the profession ('agency') as it is constrained by the outside environment ('structure').

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Notes

- 1 A necessary adaptation concerned the front page of *The Times* which in 1960–1 was reserved for advertisements and obituaries; in those years we coded political articles from the inside pages (only those half a page or larger, or accompanied by a picture or a very bold headline; N=124).
- 2 To standardise the aggregate objectivity index, the following formula was applied: $(x_i - \min_{[th]}) / (\max_{[th]} - \min_{[th]})$; x_i refers to the empirical value of the aggregate objectivity index x , $\min_{[th]}$ to the minimal theoretical value of the aggregate index (here 0), and $\max_{[th]}$ to the maximal theoretical value (here 4).
- 3 All news articles were analysed by international student coders who received extensive training prior to coding. Inter-coder reliability tests were calculated separately for all language groups. Average Cohen's *kappa* coefficients within each language group were 0.81–1.0 for all format-based variables and 0.61–0.80 for all content-based variables.
- 4 The visual message of Figure 10.1 is also statistically confirmed by univariate analyses of variance which found highly significant differences in country means for the 1960s ($F(5, 1399) = 21.94, p < .001, R^2\text{-adj.} = .069$) and much less robust – albeit still significant – differences for the 2000s ($F(5, 1801) = 2.53, p < .05, R^2\text{-adj.} = .004$). The decrease in cross-national variance is clearly expressed in the R^2 values.
- 5 This can be demonstrated statistically by way of another univariate analysis of variance. It finds much stronger differences across the six nations' objectivity indices in the 2000s ($F(5, 1686) = 63.88, p < .001, R^2\text{-adj.} = .157$) than in the 1960s ($F(5, 1311) = 14.32, p < .001, R^2\text{-adj.} = .048$) as expressed by the R^2 values.
- 6 The divergence of the 1960s ($F(5, 547) = 9.65, p < .001, R^2\text{-adj.} = .073$) was surpassed by the divergence of the 2000s ($F(5, 1067) = 37.37, p < .001, R^2\text{-adj.} = .145$) as expressed in the R^2 values of two analyses of variance.
- 7 To prevent historic events from distorting our data we worked with extended 24-month data-gathering periods in the 1960s and 2000s. While 'negative' events may have taken place on the days of our analysis, coders were instructed

to assess the *presentational style* of the stories and not the inherent quality of the underlying events.

- 8 The mean averages reported in Table 10.2 differ significantly between the six countries, both in the 1960s ($F(5, 659) = 5.46, p < .001, R^2\text{-adj.} = .033$) and in the 2000s ($F(5, 1236) = 21.26, p < .001, R^2\text{-adj.} = .075$).
- 9 This association for the 1960s is $\chi^2 = 98, df = 35, p < .001$; for the 2000s it is $\chi^2 = 345, df = 35, p < .001$.